

Anthrax Threat

Guide for Public Safety Agencies



Anthrax is a disease caused by a bacterium (*Bacillus anthracis*) that can be spread in its dormant (spore) form. It is harmful only if a sufficient dose is inhaled, ingested, or introduced into an open cut or wound. Anthrax is **not** spread from person to person (i.e., by coughing or sneezing). **Potentially exposed individuals do not need to be isolated or quarantined.**

Determination of whether a substance contains anthrax spores can be made only by a qualified laboratory, such as the Washington State Public Health Laboratory in Shoreline (206/361-2914).

In the event of a terrorism threat, contact:

- Local law enforcement
- FBI Western WA: 206/622-0460
 Eastern WA: 509/747-5195
 After hours statewide: 206/622-0460
- Local emergency management agency
(or the State Emergency Management
duty officer at 1-800/258-5990)

If you suspect an anthrax threat:

- Any package that may contain anthrax should be left undisturbed to avoid release of spores into the air.
- Evacuate and secure the area that shares airspace around the package until it (as well as any spilled contents) is properly removed and contained.
- All unprotected persons handling such packages (typically envelopes) should immediately wash their hands thoroughly with soap and warm water. **Special decontamination is normally not warranted.**
- Remove and double bag (using plastic trash bags) any visibly contaminated clothing. **Please note:** these clothes may be considered evidence and should not be laundered until released by the FBI.
- Record names, phone numbers and addresses of all persons who handled or shared airspace with the opened package.
- A trained individual wearing a HEPA mask and gloves should place the package in a plastic zip-lock bag which then should be placed in another airtight container no larger than a one-gallon paint can.
- Coordinate specimen testing with the Washington State Public Health Laboratory (206/361-2914).
- The FBI and local law enforcement will coordinate transportation of the specimen to the laboratory. **Field testing of this material is generally not recommended.**
- The material should be considered physical evidence in a criminal investigation and should be handled and accounted for accordingly to maintain the chain of custody.
- In the event that the material is determined to contain anthrax spores, exposed persons should be evaluated for treatment by a physician.



Mary Selecky, Secretary of Health
Maxine Hayes, MD, State Health Officer

These guidelines are provided to Public Safety Officials by the Washington State Department of Health, and are endorsed by the Washington Emergency Management Council and its Committee on Terrorism.

For more information, contact your local health department, or visit our web site at:
www.doh.wa.gov/Alerts/Anthrax.htm